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EXECUTIVE CREATIVE DIRECTOR

SWITCH

liberateyourbrand.com



LINDSAY MALONEY

DIRECTOR OF EXPERIENTIAL

SOURCE MARKETING

source-marketing.com



MICHAEL CAREY

EXECUTIVE VP

FLUENT

fluentgrp.com



JASON WOZNY

VICE PRESIDENT

MATCH ACTION

matchaction.com



CASSIE HUGHES

COFOUNDER

GROW MARKETING

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25 TIPS FOR ENGAGING OVER THE HOLIDAYS

How to Keep Holiday Campaigns Engaging, Relevant and Extra Experiential During the Most Wonderful Time of the Year, including:

- ✓ Trends you gotta know about this holiday season
- ✓ Biggest keys to a killer holiday program
- ✓ Best ways to reach more people using social media
- ✓ New on-site technologies
- ✓ Mistakes marketers make each season (and how to avoid them)

Hear that? It's not the distant jingle of silver bells. It's the sound of cash registers collectively ringing in the most powerful spending quarter of the year: the holidays. Smart marketers are already rolling out full experiential campaigns to cut through all the noise and engage with their busy target customers one-on-one. Why? Because even though consumers this time of year are busy, stressed out and crunched for time, there's no other time of year when they're more engaged with the brands they love or receptive to a brand engagement that can make the most 'wonderful' time of the year a little more, well, wonderful. "There's an art and science to activating the holiday season," says Larry Hess, CEO of leading event staffing partner Encore Nationwide. "This year's programs need to be relevant, engaging and experiential."

Here, we present 25 tips and insights from our Agency All-Stars on the do's and don'ts of holiday activations. Ready to get that register ringing? Read on.



1. KEEP IT SIMPLE

Holiday campaigns are all about balance. Lean too much on Santa and his sleigh and you might alienate entire groups of consumers. Attempt to incorporate too many seasonal and religious icons or messages into your campaign and you'll confuse people. If a consumer has to Google what they just experienced when they get home, you've failed.

2. GET BACK TO BASICS

Last season, brands set out to "disrupt" consumers with campaigns that made them laugh or cry. This year, brands are redefining the strategy and respecting the rituals of the holiday first, focusing on food, family and giving. Holidays offer brands the distinct opportunity to enhance, encourage or be woven into the traditions of the season. Harness these sentiments, and make your campaign about what's important to consumers this time of year—not just to the brand.

3. THINK: SURPRISE AND DELIGHT

WestJet Airlines left marketers salivating last season with the mega viral stunt "Christmas Miracle," in which unsuspecting passengers told a digital Santa what they wanted for Christmas, and when they arrived at their destination—the requested gift was delivered at baggage claim. Inspired by this program, expect to see brands and agencies go for stunts like this that spread goodwill for the brand through surprise and delight experiences.

4. MAKE RETAIL AN EXPERIENCE, TOO

While online shopping makes it easy for consumers to research products and read reviews, studies show that most still rely on brick and mortar stores for the final purchase. Stores inherently offer the look, feel and sound of a retail brand, so don't miss an opportunity to enhance the shopping experience with in-store events or VIP perks for shoppers that make the pain of holiday shopping a little less painful. Key tip: Staff it well to capitalize on face-to-face interactions and to provide that ease of engagement consumers are looking for.

5. SKIP THE HARD SELL

Holiday creep and Christmas shopping hours that start on Thanksgiving have given more than a few consumers a bad taste in their mouth over what the holidays are really all about. Add to that the factions of millennial consumers who just seem to know when they're being marketed to and you've got a recipe for

target market tune-out. Combat the cynicism with a softer sell. Don't breathe down attendees' necks. If the brand is launching a new product, give consumers the chance to win it. Don't attach a registration process to a product interaction. And if you accommodate on-site product purchases at an off-site event, ditch the bleak clusters of cash registers and activate a streamlined mobile solution instead.

6. TIE IN A LIKE-MINDED CAUSE MARKETING ELEMENT

Engaging consumers in a cause or leveraging a charitable tie-in to drive awareness about the brand can strike a much-needed authentic chord during the holidays. Be sure, however, that the emotion behind it resonates with the brand. Some feel-good examples: Macy's "Believe" campaign, where kids mail letters for Santa in-store, and for each letter Macy's donates \$1 to Make-A-Wish. Or (RED), an AIDS charity that has dozens of brands pledging support through initiatives and offers that are deeply integrated with their own brands and product lines.

7. BE PICKY ABOUT YOUR STAFF

Tensions can run high during the holidays (The shopping! The cooking! The mother-in-law!), but brands can make a positive impact by offering that unexpectedly pleasant exchange during an otherwise stressful day. Staff your holiday events with brand ambassadors who have that rare combination of warmth and customer service experience that consumers will go home talking about (in a good way).

8. DON'T MAKE THEM JUMP THROUGH HOOPS

Here's a scenario: You've launched a holiday mall campaign and you've built a killer activation. But to get to the meat of the experience requires a consumer with four shopping bags slung on his or her shoulder, and possibly a child or two, to register here, sign-in there, or answer a list of questions. Keep it streamlined and get consumers to the heart of the brand, faster.

9. BE SURE TO ADD VALUE

A good holiday program doesn't distract consumers from their already hectic lives—it adds value when they're most piqued for it. Before you kick off your campaign, ask your team: How can we make a shopping experience easier or better for consumers? What role can our brand play in transforming pain points into shareable moments? Some examples: if

you're a spirits brand, perhaps you offer a lesson in mixology for the time-strapped holiday party hostess. If you're a beauty brand, maybe there's a quick spa experience you can provide. Non-endemic brands can get in on the game, too, with simple but useful things everyone needs, like a free cup of coffee, shopping bag storage or giftwrap. Start with their most pressing needs and then go from there.

10. INCLUDE AN ELEMENT OF DISCOVERY

Millennials in particular want to be "the first" when it comes to hot new products, upgrades or a new category. They're early adopters and they want to share this information immediately. Not to mention, first person, word-of-mouth recommendations are key for brands who want to get their messages out (and who doesn't?) Curated activities that allow consumers to experience the brand in the context of something breaking, new or yet-to-be-discovered can generate great viral value. Help them find it, and they'll share it.

11. TRY CONSUMER-DRIVEN ENGAGEMENT TOOLS

There's nothing like a dose of crowd-generated excitement to set off a viral hit. Take the Twitter-enabled vending machine, where consumers drive the experience with a tweet in exchange for a gift. Twitter walls, Instagram walls or mosaic walls, where consumers on-site experience the instant gratification of seeing their personal posts displayed on a massive scale, are all physical event components that are becoming a checklist item for social media savvy marketers.

12. CREATE A SOCIAL CURRENCY EXCHANGE

Brands around the world are testing the waters with a new definition of "social currency," where consumers "pay" for samples, products or services with a Tweet or a post on a social network. Kellogg's Tweet Shop kicked off the trend with a pop-up store in London that let consumers pay for a snack with a Tweet. Look for other social currency-based events to pop up more often, especially during the holidays.

13. USE TECHNOLOGY TO TELL YOUR STORY

Expect to see a lift in Oculus Rift-style virtual reality technology activations, holograms and interactive video walls—all technology components that are not only hot right now, they also can help brands

transport consumers to other (think: less stressful) environments. Take for instance, a virtual dressing room. It's the kind of tech consumers don't get to experience every day, and it offers that escape consumers are craving from all the noise of the season.

14. DON'T DISCOUNT LIVE STREAMING AND WEBCASTING

Consumers crave human connections more than ever during the holidays, but that doesn't mean virtual event experiences don't have a place. Brands are continuing to leverage live streams and webcasts to bring exciting product launches to the masses in real-time (especially useful when winter storms have consumers trapped at home or in airports). One recent example: Jaguar's London launch of the new Jaguar XE in September which involved two programs—a world premiere and a live performance, both streamed live at jaguar.com.

15. KICK THE STEP-AND-REPEAT TO THE CURB

Instagram's release of the new feature Hyperlapse, which enables users to capture high-quality time-lapse videos while in motion, is changing the game on what shareable content could and should look like. Another hot app: Momentage, which combines photos, video and sound images into a single post to create a "vivid storytelling moment." Skip that static snapshot in front of a boring backdrop and incorporate photo or video activations that let consumers get creative and curate a moment into one highly sharable post—and boost—for the brand.

16. MAKE THE LEAP TO E-WALLET SOLUTIONS

Peer-to-peer and mobile payment apps and solutions are all the rage, gaining an especially strong following among millennial consumers. They're using their devices to pay back their friends, pay their rent, and make one-touch mobile purchases of the products and services they want—instantly. As part of your push toward simplified and easier-to-enjoy consumer experiences, why stop at the clunky cash register? Introduce consumers to some of these new technologies or, better yet, incorporate them into your event.

17. EXPLORE HOW TO PLAY WITH FRACTIONAL OWNERSHIP TRENDS

Another growing trend among millennials—the "shared economy" or "fractional ownership."



Millennials are essentially renting more than they are buying, and with everything from prom dresses (think *Rent the Runway*) to cars (Zipcar). It used to be that consumers in this age group set out to make a couple of high-end purchases. Today, they're happy to borrow something they couldn't afford otherwise and then give it back. Intel recently activated a loaner program anchored by a community-based event that sent consumers home to try out its newest laptops. What can you "rent" to your target consumers?

18. BUILD A SOCIAL MOVEMENT

How many "Ice Bucket Challenge" videos have you seen on Facebook? This sensational fundraiser for ALS research is a chilling example of a call to action that works. Fans have personalized their videos, they're getting their networks directly involved in the action and, most importantly, they've been able to spread goodwill—the best kind of content there is. A brand's "Social Ask" this holiday season (see tip #6 for more ideas) should have context and purpose and build on an ongoing discussion or message with the brand, rather than be a blip on somebody's timeline.

19. BEWARE THE BURNOUT ON HASHTAGS AND ACRONYMS

Which brings us to the next point—don't overdo it on the lingo and the acronyms, or promote baseless hashtags, especially if you're trying to reach millennials. These consumers are just too dang savvy and see right through overdone attempts to stay on trend. Don't be lame. And just say "no" to YOLO. And LOL. And OMG. K?

20. PICK THE RIGHT PLATFORM

Every good campaign includes a fully integrated social media plan, but brands must identify which platform is right for the job. Because not all of them will be. Facebook connects families, friends and classmates with personal messages or news. Twitter is a global town square of news and gossip. Instagram is more about moments and imagery. Develop a social amplification plan up front and a pathway to a platform will emerge.

21. PIN IT, BABY!

According to Lab42, a market research agency, 54 percent of Pinterest users spend more time on the site during the holiday months, and 43 percent have a "board" designated for the holidays. As such, for holiday retailers, Pinterest is fertile ground for engagement. Take Target's "Awesome Shop"—it

allows consumers to explore and shop instantly for the day's most pinned items from Target. Whether the brand curates a board, or you target consumers who are curating their own boards, this is the platform of the holiday season.

22. GET IN ON THE WEARABLES GAME

Wearable technology, like smart watches, fabrics, jewelry and even socks, have been on the scene for a few years now, but with the upcoming launch of Apple Watch, we'll all need to *watch* to see how consumer demand for the product affects consumer expectations at events. In the meantime, keep a strategic eye towards the trend and don't jump in unless the technology maps back to the brand, the message and the objectives.

23. TRACK PROGRESS. MAKE CHANGES.

We're in an industry that's thriving on real-time data, going beyond tallies and end-of-day reporting to data collection that offers instant feedback. You can go high-tech for your hourly snapshots, but you can also turn to social media to track the effectiveness of a campaign based on share of voice. How is the content being shared and what are people saying? And, is it worth responding to fans and followers? If you want to make the most of your time during a holiday campaign, shift, evolve and improve it as the days and weeks progress.

24. USE THOSE YEAR-END INSIGHTS

The end of the year is the best opportunity for a brand to take all its learned from the year from consumers, from analytics, from social media tracking, and apply it richly to a holiday program. If your client's most loyal brand fans have been asking for someone or something throughout the year, give it to them during the holidays. Listen, react and save the best for last.

25. DON'T START TOO LATE

Successful holiday campaigns need extra time to be developed and executed properly. Remember, you're activating at the height of the season (along with everyone else), so build in extra time for securing permits, venues and other logistics. Stay focused on the value your brand can add to your target consumers' holiday experience, and seek out the locations and opportunities that best allow you to fulfill those needs. And have a great holiday season—cheers!